PACKAGING

THE CAHNERS MAGAZINE FOR DECISION-MAKERS/APRIL 1991

C1850-1A

TACKLING SOLID WASTE

Packagers Pursue Source Reduction, Recyclability Ideas

Exclusive Survey: Consumers Perceive Overpackaging

Updates On Legal And Retail Fronts

SouthPack '91 Product Preview

What Horizontal FFS Machines Can Do For You

Package Touts Haircare Promo

LE MENU
yankee pot roast
with mushroom gravy • browned potatoes
with sauce • carrots in seasoned sauce
new improved package
SEE BACK PANEL FOR NEW DIRECTIONS
keep frozen
NET WT. 10 OZ. (284 GRAMS)
Special Reprintable Consumer Brochure Defends Packaging

BREAKING NEWS

Cheese Sauce, Archer for the Kodak sheet film tray pack, Cadillac Products for the Easi-Care respirator pouch, Duralam for Pure 'N Gentle refill packs and Dura Zip deli pouch, Flexpaq for Pantene Magpaq, James River Corp. for Betty Crocker Hot Secret microwavable bread and Scholle for Product Containment System drum liner. Hot Secret also won the President's Award; Dura Zip, the Consumer Award. The AIMCAL 11th Annual Metallized Packaging/Label Competition named the package for Mrs. Paterson's Aussie Pie package of the year. It was converted by the Flexible Packaging Group of James River. Web Technologies metallized polyester film from Hoechst Celanese to make the package. Other AIMCAL winners were: Lowry's Big Beef Jerky, Quaker Oats Cycle Dog Food and Gillette Sensor razor. For Lowrey's, Printpack converted the Vacumet-metallized polyester film from ICI. Also in the package is Dow Surlyn. The Cycle package utilizes Surlyn and ICI film metallized and converted by Printpack. For the Gillette package, Web Technologies metallized the polyester film from Hoechst, Flexcon provided the label stock and Dow Industries produced the finished labels.

University study raps Maine deposit law: A University of Maine study asks the state to discontinue its bottle-deposit system for non-carbonated beverages, which went into effect late last year, and consider eliminating the deposit system altogether once municipal recycling becomes widespread. The study also urges Maine to assist municipalities in setting up recycling/redemption centers and to free food retail stores from serving as redemption centers. The study was funded by the National Food Processors Association, Washington, D.C.

Book calls plastic packaging a 'dilemma': A cover blurb for the new book *Plastics: America's Packaging Dilemma* (Island Press, Washington, D.C.) calls plastic "the throwaway society's material of choice." Authors Nancy Wolf and Ellen Feldman suggest that "Packaging should be reusable" and "Packaging should be made of a single material." They also state, "Consideration should be given to banning the use of materials for food packaging that physically and technologically cannot be reprocessed into food packaging."

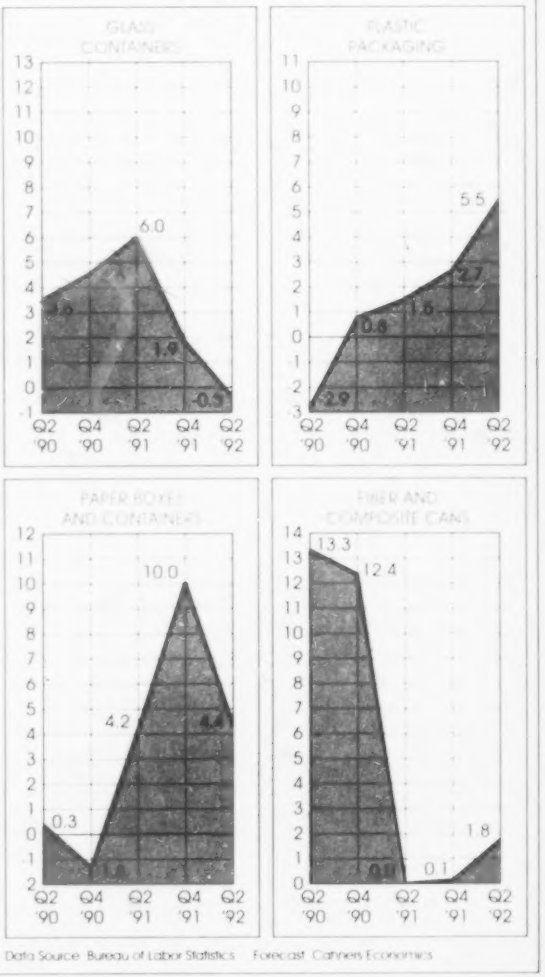
Researchers see healthy growth for labels: A new report by The Freedonia Group, Cleveland, Ohio, predicts that domestic demand for labels in packaging will grow at more than 7.1% per year through 1995. Helping drive this growth will be new applications for plastic containers, the study says.

CORRUGATED MOVES UP

The slow economy is forcing the prices of most packaging materials down, but paper-based products including corrugated containers are an exception. Cahners Economics forecasts that corrugated pricing will be 10% ahead of last year by the fourth quarter of 1991. Factors behind the rise include tightening demand as industrial markets begin to recover later this year. Meanwhile, glass and fiber-can prices are moderating and plastics pricing is expected to show only moderate gains through the remainder of 1991.

PRODUCER PRICE INDEXES

% Change Vs. Year Ago



Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Forecast: Cahners Economics

PACKAGING

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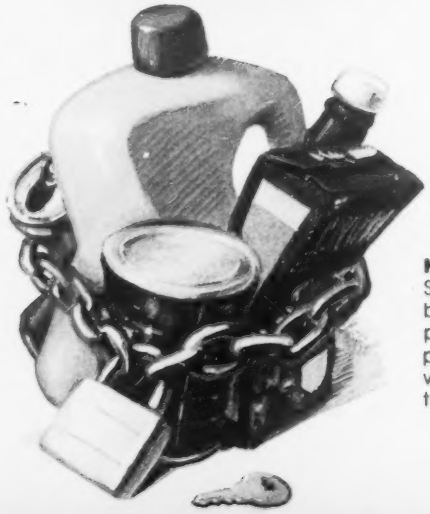
VOLUME 36 NUMBER 5

From nylons to nougat bars, a wide range of products can benefit from horizontal form-fill-sealing. Page **44**

More than 10,000 packaging professionals are expected to attend SouthPack '91 in Atlanta. Page **49**



No packaging? Some legislators blame our trash problem on packages and want to outlaw them. Page **35**

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More than 300 exhibitors team with QualityPack, EnviPack conferences May 6-8 in Atlanta

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On the cover: Campbell's LeMenu frozen-dinner line employs new lidding technology to cut packaging material by 25%. Photo by Kevin Banna. Page **24**

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Toothpaste pump has refill cartridge; foot-care bottles are refillable

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Special-edition graphics help boost Bold Hold sales to teenagers. Page **13**

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COMING NEXT MONTH

Preprinted corrugated means profit
Housewares, produce and P-O-P displays rely on it for eye-catching appeal. How does preprint affect recyclability?

Preview of the National Plastics Expo
We cover the conferences and list the packaging-related exhibitors at this major plastics trade show

Special Report: PEF Roundtable
New packaging-program graduates show how schooling pays off

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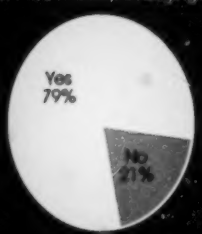
CONSUMERS PERCEIVE OVERPACKAGING

Do you think some products use too much packaging?

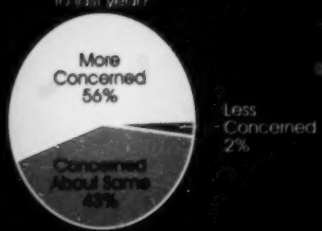


Packaging has a perception problem. Nearly four of five Americans believe some products are overpackaged.

Source: Packaging Consumer Study

SOLID WASTE CONCERN GROWS

How do you feel about the trash problem this year compared to last year?



American consumers concern about the growing trash problem is clearly shown in statistics compiled by numerous opinion polls.

Source: Packaging Consumer Study

Reducing Solid Waste

Changing attitudes and economics prompt new interest in package redesign with source reduction the goal

By Robin Ashton, Greg Erickson and Melissa Larson

The pressure on packagers to help solve the trash problem has not lessened. New research by PACKAGING shows that most consumers are more concerned about the issue this year than last. And significantly, most of them say they see signs of excessive packaging.

State and local legislators have introduced a new wave of anti-packaging legislation, undeterred by the defeat of environmental referenda in California and Oregon last year. The new bills seek to set recycling rates, ban nonrecyclable containers and force changes in packaging.

Packagers are struggling to make sensible decisions. Their task has been complicated by debate over terms such as "recyclable," "recycled content," "environmentally friendly" and "green." These conflicts and the emergence of competing organizations that seek to certify environmental claims have led to calls for consistent federal guidelines. The feds so far have demurred . . . and the marketing field has become a minefield.

Nevertheless, several large packagers of consumer goods have been trumpeting their strategies for using recycled materials and increasing package recyclability.

Led by Procter & Gamble, detergent packagers have increasingly incorporated recycled materials in their containers. Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola have begun programs to use post-consumer PET in new beverage bottles. H.J. Heinz has announced plans to switch from polypropylene to PET for its squeezable ketchup bottles, stressing increased recyclability.

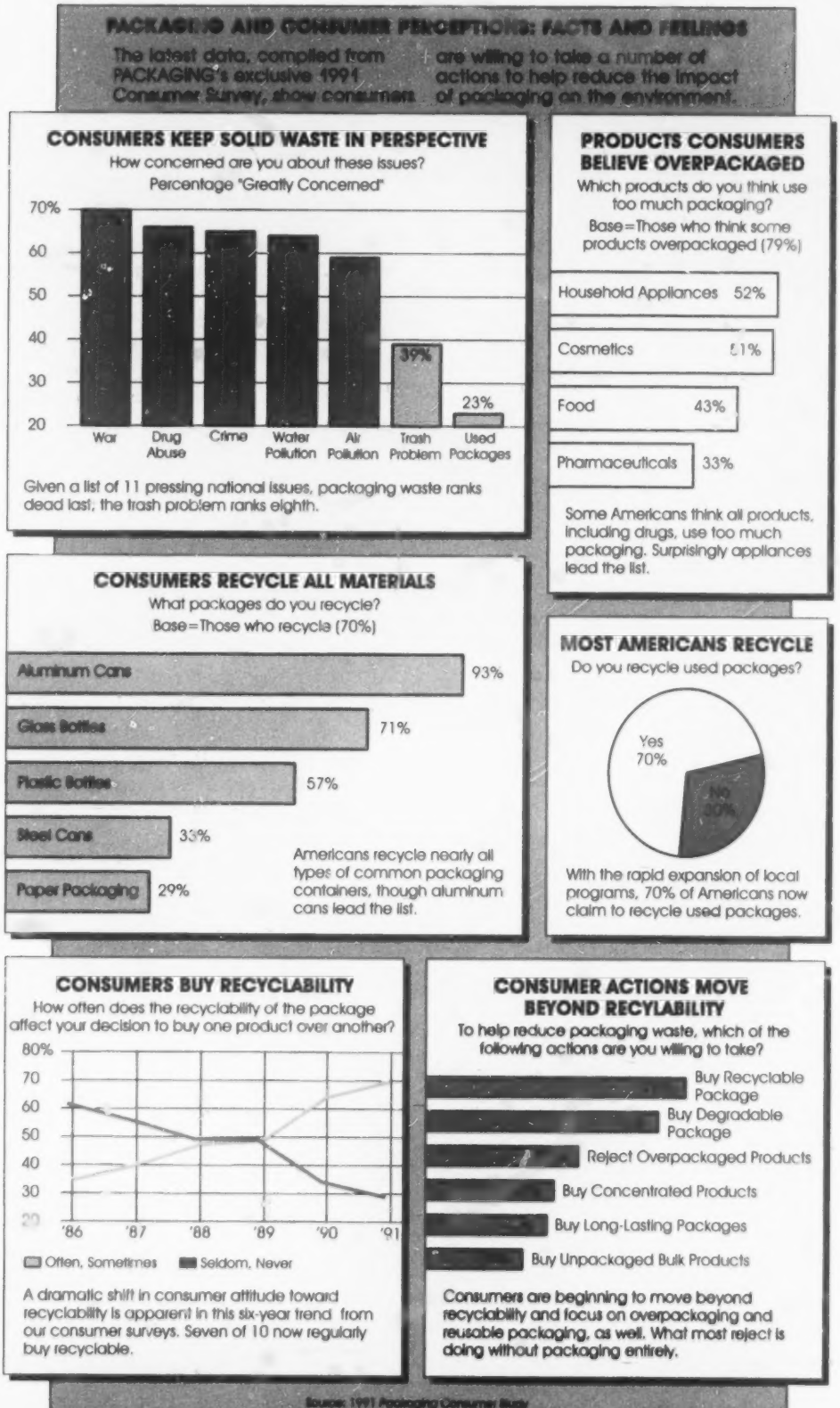
Indeed, recycling is the strategy that has received most attention in the popular media. But data from PACKAGING's 1991 Consumer Survey reveal some new thinking. Consumers are considering the amount of packaging that surrounds products they purchase. Nearly four out of five respondents say they believe some products are overpackaged.

Inspiringly, a host of packagers have been pursuing source reduction. This strategy offers a number of advantages. First, it places a premium on efficient use of material—getting the most protection from the least packaging. Second, it can save a packager money. Third, it can circumvent arguments about recyclability and recycled content, affording packagers a noncontroversial marketing advantage.

Packagers working toward source reduction are pursuing diverse technologies. Some reduce material by switching con-

Two solid-waste strategies: Campbell Soup employed new lidding technology on its LeMenu line (top) to reduce material by 25%. Ethan Allen's Tom Lowery (left, above) helped fashion a comprehensive environmental program that includes foam recycling.

Consumers move beyond recyclability and begin to focus on overpackaging


PACKAGING AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS: FACTS AND FEELINGS
The latest data, compiled from PACKAGING's exclusive 1991 Consumer Survey, show consumers are willing to take a number of actions to help reduce the impact of packaging on the environment.
CONSUMERS KEEP SOLID WASTE IN PERSPECTIVE
How concerned are you about these issues?
Percentage "Greatly Concerned"
70%
60
50
40
30
20
War
Drug Abuse
Crime
Water Pollution
Air Pollution
Trash Problem
39%
Used Packages
23%
Given a list of 11 pressing national issues, packaging waste ranks dead last, the trash problem ranks eighth.
PRODUCTS CONSUMERS BELIEVE OVERPACKAGED
Which products do you think use too much packaging?
Base=Those who think some products overpackaged (79%)
Household Appliances 52%
Cosmetics 51%
Food 43%
Pharmaceuticals 33%
Some Americans think all products, including drugs, use too much packaging. Surprisingly appliances lead the list.
CONSUMERS RECYCLE ALL MATERIALS
What packages do you recycle?
Base=Those who recycle (70%)
Aluminum Cans 93%
Glass Bottles 71%
Plastic Bottles 57%
Steel Cans 33%
Paper Packaging 29%
Americans recycle nearly all types of common packaging containers, though aluminum cans lead the list.
MOST AMERICANS RECYCLE
Do you recycle used packages?
Yes 70%
No 30%
With the rapid expansion of local programs, 70% of Americans now claim to recycle used packages.
CONSUMERS BUY RECYCLABILITY
How often does the recyclability of the package affect your decision to buy one product over another?
80%
70
60
50
40
30
20
'86
'87
'88
'89
'90
'91
Often, Sometimes
Seldom, Never
A dramatic shift in consumer attitude toward recyclability is apparent in this six-year trend from our consumer surveys. Seven of 10 now regularly buy recyclable.
CONSUMER ACTIONS MOVE BEYOND RECYLABILITY
To help reduce packaging waste, which of the following actions are you willing to take?
Buy Recyclable Package
Buy Degradable Package
Reject Overpackaged Products
Buy Concentrated Products
Buy Long-Lasting Packages
Buy Unpackaged Bulk Products
Consumers are beginning to move beyond recyclability and focus on overpackaging and reusable packaging, as well. What most reject is doing without packaging entirely.
Source: 1991 Packaging Consumer Study

tainers; others by reconfiguring existing packages. Still others pursue package reusability, designing containers that have long-term uses. Along the way, some are also able to increase recyclability.

The following examples illustrate real-world applications of these techniques.

Chopping the dome

Campbell Soup Co. recently reduced the weight and volume of packaging for its LeMenu frozen entrees.

A new proprietary lidding film made primarily of PET has allowed Campbell to eliminate the original plastic dome and foil lidding. Also, the nylon tray has been replaced with one made of PET—a material widely viewed as more recyclable. These refinements have reduced the total weight of LeMenu packaging by 25%. Campbell estimates the saving in solid waste will total more than 4 millions pounds each year.

The company has been touting the new packaging on LeMenu's recycled-paperboard carton.

In the long run, the change could save Campbell money, though John Caporaso, the company's director of packaging development, says initial savings in materials have been offset by the investment in first-of-its-kind equipment to apply the lidding.

Jeno Van Winkle

Cost was a factor for Luigino's Inc. as the new company founded by frozen-food veteran Jeno F. Paulucci developed packaging for its Michelina's line of frozen pasta entrees. Luigino's also discovered solid-waste considerations were a factor in getting retail buyers to slot and display the product.

"Being out of the industry for five years since selling Jeno's to Pillsbury, I was amazed at how sensitive buyers were to these issues," says Paulucci. "It was like

Rip Van Winkle waking up."

Luigino's selected a dual-ovenable, polyester-coated paperboard carton consisting only of tray and lid. A typical tray-lidding-carton configuration for 10-ounce frozen entrees might weigh 48 grams. The Michelina's package weighs only 27 grams.

Paulucci says, "this package gives Michelina's better sales potential. And any leg up in this competitive environment is a plus."

Sting and the longbox

Designed to fill the same shelving depth as 12-inch vinyl records, the so-called longbox surrounding compact discs has been called excessive. A number of prominent musicians—several involved in much-publicized environmental causes—have been among those calling for a change.

When recording star Sting announced last year that he would not allow his new release to be sold in the longbox, executives at his label A&M Records sought an alternative. They found one at AGI Inc., Melrose Park, Ill., a supplier of packaging to the cosmetics and entertainment industry.

In 1985 AGI had developed and patented DigiPak, a paperboard-plastic substitute for the combination of longbox and jewel case. As pressure to "ban the box" began to build in the U.S. last year, AGI modified the DigiPak to create a package that was both longbox and storage case in one. Trademarked DigiTrak, the package significantly reduces the amount of packaging material used while providing similar merchandising advantages.

Richard Block, AGI president, says Sting is so pleased with the package that he has discussed it favorably in recent interviews.

Squaring up with PET

When Nathan Arthur, president of Arcadia Farms,

LEGISLATIVE HOT SPOTS: 1990 and 1991

Solid-waste legislation on both coasts is entering what might be termed its second generation: draconian measures introduced in several statehouses during 1990 proved unpalatable and were killed either by lawmakers or voters—sending their sponsors back to the drawing board. However, state budget deficits, especially in the Northeast, and public pressure to reduce solid waste by targeted deadlines make it likely that some legislators will try again, perhaps with packaging taxes or heavier disposal fees.

What to watch for in 1991: Advance disposal fees will be under consideration in several states. California will lead a host of states attempting to follow New York and Rhode Island in establishing their own definitions of such terms as "recyclable," "biodegradable" and "photodegradable." Repeated calls for federal intervention and national labeling standards appear doomed. Stay tuned.

State Highlights: 1990

California: Despite the defeat of Big Green, California legislators scored one major victory for environmental activists: Bill AB 3994, which established an environmental truth-in-advertising program and set definitions for terms like "recyclable." It was signed into law last fall over the objections of several packaging associations. So-called "clean-up" legislation will amend the bill in 1991. Legislators also pondered advance disposal fees. Observers at National Food Processors Association and the Flexible Packaging Association are betting that these fees will make headlines in 1991.

Massachusetts: A petition proposed by the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group regarding the use of plastic packaging—which would have banned packaging that wasn't reusable, recyclable or made of recycled materials by the end of 1995—was ruled invalid on a technicality by the commonwealth's supreme court and was kept off the November 1990 ballot. The MASSPIRG initiative acted as a lightning rod for packaging-field concerns and seemed to galvanize an organized effort by groups such as Society of the Plastics Industry and FPA to make legislators aware of the impracticality of much of the proposed action.

Minnesota: After passing its landmark "environmentally acceptable packaging" ordinance in 1989, Minneapolis' city council and Minnesota's state legislative bodies began to sort out which types of packaging would comply. The Council for Solid Waste Solutions lobbied successfully for approval of plastic bottles. The Governor's Select Committee on Packaging and the Environment delivered its report on recommended fees, labeling, collection and the preemption of local packaging bans. Once advocating severe packaging bans, Twin Cities municipal leaders ended up initiating one of the country's most broad-based recycling programs.

New York: Opting not to wait for federal guidelines on environmental labeling, New York State legislators established their own criteria and emblems for voluntary labeling of packaging as "recycled," etc. Regulations were finalized in the fall of 1990. If manufacturers choose to identify any environmental attribute of the package, they must comply with state criteria.

Oregon: The so-called Oregon State Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG) initiative, defeated by a wide margin on Nov. 6, 1990, would have required packaging sold within the state to be reusable five times, have a 50% recycle rate or a 50% recycled content . . . or risk being banned. A broad industry coalition called the Oregon Committee for Recycling mounted an expensive campaign to defeat the measure.

States To Watch: 1991

California: AB 144, the so-called clean-up bill amending AB 3994, should address some of the packaging field's concerns about language used in the first bill: namely, definitions of environment-oriented marketing terms and the timetable for the labeling laws to take effect. Assemblyman Byron Sher, author of both bills, appears to be willing to work with industry on these points. However, to the problems arising from a host of conflicting state labeling laws he appears to have turned a deaf legislative ear.

Sher is likely to also introduce legislation establishing an advance disposal fee system. These fees would reflect the cost of disposing of or recycling various materials that contribute to the solid-waste stream. These would be assessed at the manufacturer, distributor or retailer level, not at the point of disposal. Fees would vary from material to material. This proposal seems certain to touch off a full-scale war between proponents of competitive packaging materials.

New York: Industry watchers are bracing for the possible introduction of a proposal by New York's Public Interest Research Group, called the Waste Reduction and Packaging Act, which would not only require packaging to be reusable five times or be made with 50% recycled content but also require a 60% recycling rate by 1994.

Oregon: Packaging-field observers expect trouble from Senate Bill 66. This integrated solid-waste measure would establish a state task force with authority to recommend package design changes and recycled-content requirements. The Oregon Committee for Recycling is formulating its own legislative proposal stressing local recycling and increased markets for recyclables.

Other potential hot-spots: Florida and *Texas*, two populous states that have thus far watched the legislative furor from the sidelines, have new governors with possible environmentalist leanings. *New Jersey* has a gaggle of bills pending, proposing everything from taxing rigid containers to mandating state purchases of recycled materials.

Obviously, these are just the highlights. A host of other state legislation had, and will continue to have, an impact on the environmental scene. As state bills make news in 1991, we'll keep you informed in our monthly "Environmental News" section.

—M.L.

Packaging source reduction has received little media attention

Tool maker Vermont-American abandoned skin packages for clamshells which serve as storage cases in its line for Sears Roebuck & Co.

Faucet Queens' Helping Hand line of small hardware items now are packaged in unusual blister packages that become permanent storage cases after removing printed card.

Asheville, N.C., was considering a package for a new sports drink dubbed ProFormance, his eye was caught by a new bottle a friend found in England.

What first attracted him was the bottle's rectangular shape for better shelf face and in-plant stability, and its clarity for merchandising value. But as he and his partner began planning introduction of the drink, environmental advantages of the container began to take on greater importance.

Arthur saw that the one-piece, all-PET design would simplify recycling. Labeling also was chosen with recycling in mind.

"I knew a lot of dairies whose bottles were tough to recycle because of a paper label and glue," he says. "We also looked at areas we wanted to market, and the strict recycling legislation in Florida concerned us. So we basically designed the package to meet the Florida guidelines, while keeping Maine and California in view."

The resulting package employs a polypropylene stretch-sleeve label using no glue and a polypropylene dispenser cap. The lack of base cup reduces material as well.

"We do state the package's recyclability on the label," Arthur notes. "It's definitely a plus in the retail environment today."

Attention Sears shoppers

While the packaging of general-merchandise products "has not taken a [solid-waste] hit so far," says Keith B. Tice, director of packaging and labeling for Sears, Roebuck & Co., "we anticipate it will."

In response, Sears has established a far-reaching policy to minimize packaging waste wherever possible. The program includes lightweighting, setting recycled-content goals for corrugated and use of recycled plastic edgeboards. For hardware and other items typically packaged in plastics, Sears urges its suppliers to make their packages reusable or refillable.

Vermont-American, one of Sears's largest hardware suppliers and the world's largest producer of accessories for power tools, has employed plastic clamshells as reusable storage cases for several years. Jim Luebbers, Vermont-American marketing manager, says the original idea behind reusable packages had nothing to do with solid waste. "We wanted to give our customers increased utility and value," he says.

During the last couple years, Luebbers' company and Sears recognized that the technique had positive solid-waste implications. While neither Vermont-American nor Sears openly touts the solid-waste advantages of reusability on the packages, V-A has added the SPI recycling symbol to clamshells where applicable.

A Helping Hand

Another hardware packager, The Faucet Queens, Wheeling, Ill., has also used the storage-case idea for its Helping Hand line of nails, tacks and picture hangers.

"Nearly all such items are sold at retail in carded blisters," says John Lehman, company president. "The consumer had the problem of what to do with the leftovers. We hit upon the idea of increasing the mix and number of items in a particular package, which reduced SKUs, and making the blister a storage case."

How to create a storage case from a carded blister proved a bit of a challenge. But Lehman, working closely with his supplier, discovered he could put the blister on the back of the card, which was die-cut for visibility. The consumer simply pulls off the card, leaving the PVC storage case.

Legal uncertainty about terms such as "recyclable" keeps packagers cautious

Rectangular PET bottle used for ProFormance sports drink eliminates HDPE base cup and uses no-adhesive PP shrink-sleeve label and PP closure to ease recycling.

SUPERMARKET INDUSTRY PRESENTS A UNITED FRONT

One subplot has almost been lost in the environmental drama taking place in today's supermarkets. It's the friction between grocery manufacturers, whose products fill the shelves, and supermarket retailers, who travel the aisles and take the heat from Mr. and Mrs. American Shopper when those products aren't "green."

Supermarket wholesalers, by acting as a conduit for the needs of their retailer-customers, have also been drawn into the fray.

This friction, and the need to take a proactive stance on solid-waste legislation, recently led the grocery industry to form its own Committee on Solid Waste. The group's stated mission is "to develop, implement and support joint grocery industry projects and programs that contribute to the advancement of a national integrated waste management system."

Made up of representatives of such industry groups as the Grocery Manufacturers of America Inc., the Food Marketing Institute, the National-American Wholesale Grocers Association and the National Food Processors Association, the group met for the first time last May.

Four subcommittees deal with principal aspects of the program: market development, scientific and technical research, public policy and legislation, and consumer education. The scientific and technical research subcommittee is available to the other three groups as an in-house resource to answer technical questions.

Perhaps because of its members' clout (many are CEOs of supermarket chains and food companies), the group has moved swiftly to combine resources and come up with recommendations for government legislators.

Since the NFPA had already launched its own task force to study environmental labeling, the public policy subcommittee adopted the food processors' findings. The solid-waste committee has endorsed the NFPA's environmental-labeling petition to the Federal Trade Commission. Presentation of the petition to the FTC is imminent as of this writing.

Althought the details of the petition have not been made public yet, the NFPA is on record as advocating one national standard for environmental advertising claims, and also stresses the importance of maintaining food safety even as solid waste goals are being pursued.

The market development subcommittee is forming task forces whose aim will be to stimulate market demand for recycled items made from materials the grocery industry generates in abundance: plastic bags, shrink wrap—even pallets. Both recycling and composting will be researched.

As the Grocery Industry Committee on Solid Waste completes its first year, Peter Larkin, FMI spokesperson, sees progress on several fronts.

"I feel that food processors, retailers and wholesalers in our group now have a better understanding of the problems and challenges faced by the others," he says. "The solid-waste issue is more than an environmental issue for us. It's an industry-relations issue, and we feel we've made progress in communicating among ourselves." —M.L.

Luigino's chose a simple paperboard/plastic tray and lid for its Michelina's pasta line. Package saved 44% over more complex, tray-lid-carton configuration.

Introduced last year, the storage cases have garnered Lehman's company a number of major new customers, including the Walgreen's drugstore chain.

Going whole hog

Users of industrial and protective packaging are exploring a number of strategies to reduce packaging waste.

Ethan Allen, the furniture giant, has taken a leadership position with a broad-based environmental program.

"When it comes to the environment, we want to be proactive, not reactive," says Tom Lowery, director of facilities and packaging at Ethan Allen and past chairman of the Institute of Packaging Professionals. "We don't want to just follow the law, but do what's right."

In developing an environmental policy and action plan for the company, Lowery had the full support of the company's highest executives. Chairman Farooq Kathwari is a strong supporter and charged Lowery and Charles Fafaglia, the company's director of personnel, with developing a comprehensive plan.

Lowery first helped establish a corporate environmental task force that analyzed current waste volumes and set goals for specific reductions. The task force then developed specific action plans.

When it comes to packaging, the program essentially dictates that all materials be recyclable or contain recycled content and contain no chlorofluorocarbons or heavy metals.

In setting up the program, Lowery has developed an extensive list of purchasers for all materials. "Our whole thinking was could we find markets for these materials," Lowery says. "Everything we recycle, someone is paying us for."

Part of Ethan Allen's success in this regard comes

Source reduction not only reduces solid waste, it can reduce costs

from its determination to provide materials to recyclers in as clean and efficient a form as possible. The program includes installation of trash compactors in every company warehouse and store. Employees use the system to compress polyethylene and polypropylene films and foams in convenient 18-inch-square cubes. The company has even started using material-compatible adhesive tapes.

The program has also led to some materials shifts. Multilayer materials have been examined for recyclability. For example, a kraft-paper/polypropylene foam sheet structure used to protect a dining-room table was shifted to a polyspun polypropylene-foam structure.

"Now when customers ask our dealers what they're doing about the environment, we can say we're leaders," Lowery says. ■

A&M Records released Sting's new compact-disc recording in an unusual paperboard/plastic package (bottom) that works as both longbox and permanent storage case. The traditional longbox (top) has become controversial.

INDEPENDENT CERTIFIERS ELICIT MAINLY YAWNS FROM PACKAGERS

As packagers ponder how best to get their environmental message across to consumers, they're facing a hodgepodge of conflicting state labeling regulations. Meanwhile, private organizations that want to give environmental ratings to products and packages are themselves jockeying for position.

Consumers are concerned about the solid-waste effects of their favorite products and packaging. Supermarket retailers know it, packagers know it and our latest consumer survey data confirm it (see charts).

National independent certification programs, created during the chaotic period before environmental packaging claims started being challenged, were designed to award symbolic seals that marketers and retailers could use in promoting a product's friendliness toward the environment. The product manufacturer would pay for this analysis. In theory, consumers would quickly come to trust the "seal of approval" on their favorite packages.

Recently, these independent certification groups appear to be shifting to more limited, and at the same time broader, "life-cycle" analyses which include both the package and the product it contains. But controversy between the managements of competing Green Cross and Green Seal organizations over what, exactly, life-cycle analysis means has most marketers doubting that either certification service is really the answer for them.

Green Cross Certification Co., a division of Scientific Certification Systems Inc. based in Oakland, Calif., has been certifying products since June 1990. The vast majority of certified items are paper products with recycled content, such as grocery bags, dinner napkins and paper towels. The company has also "certified" several glass firms that have instituted recycling programs.

Green Cross recently announced that it will perform life-cycle analysis on total product/package systems—a service that rival Green Seal Inc. has said it will begin performing this spring. Repeated public disagreements between executives of the two services have centered on the methods used to gather information regarding a product's total effect on the environment, and on what criteria will and will not be included in the assessment.

Green Seal's CEO Denis Hayes says his organization will avoid certifying only the package and instead will use panels of experts to establish a set of criteria for each grocery product category. Even the facility where the product is made and packaged will be taken into account.

"It's misleading consumers when a manufacturer takes credit for a package using recycled content, when the product itself is harmful to the environment or when the facility where the product is packaged is fouling the downstream water and is in violation of several OSHA guidelines," he asserts.

Despite the admitted difficulty in fulfilling all the requirements necessary to obtain his firm's seal of approval, Hayes says he hopes the Green Seal will someday be as trusted and widespread as Underwriters Laboratories' "UL" designation.

Both services seem to be targeting makers of such items as household cleaners, light bulbs, and paper products—cases in which both the product and its package have an impact on the environment—and would appear to have little benefit for packagers of foods and pharmaceuticals.

One packager told us neither seal would provide the consumer with enough specific information—comparing it to the Good Housekeeping Seal. "Nobody knows what that means either."

Tom Rattray, associate director of corporate packaging development for environmental pioneer Procter & Gamble, says his company has no need for independent certification. "We have to certify the vendors who provide us with recycled packaging anyway, so we have all the supporting data we need. Our customers trust us. And we carry an 800-number on every package in case they have questions."

Linda Brown of Green Cross stresses that government legislation has traditionally mandated a "minimum guideline" and that her firm performs a necessary service in establishing a "higher standard." Still, the reaction of many packagers to independent certification programs is, "Why bother?" Of far more concern are looming state-by-state regulations governing what packagers can and cannot say on their containers.

"What we need is uniformity on a national level," says the packaging director of a major food manufacturer. "Otherwise, we're afraid the consumer will quickly become confused." Meanwhile, his company is making packaging improvements and flagging them on the new packages.

As of this writing, only two packagers have received Green Cross certification for their packages, independent of the product within: Foodworks Grown Right apple juice for its glass bottles with certified cullet content and The Clorox Co. for the recycled content of its bleach and detergent cartons.

Clorox spokesman Pat Meehan says the household product giant does not use the Green Cross symbol on its packages. "We entered the program because our retail [supermarket] customers wanted it," he explained. According to Meehan, it's up to participating retailers whether to flag the Clorox packaging as Green Cross-certified. He says his company has not compiled any information about whether consumers have noticed the certification, nor do they have data on the impact, if any, on sales.

Some packagers see the environmental labeling issue as a matter of trust. Perhaps it is. But the early days of green marketing wars—during which trash bags headed for the landfill were touted as "biodegradable" and the word "recyclable" took on a host of different meanings—just about guaranteed that some sort of legislated guidelines would eventually come into play. As far as most packagers are concerned, the sooner (and the more uniformly), the better. —M.L.

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